

Ex-Baltimorean in Congo Deal?

CIA Said to Aid Pilot Recruiting

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 — An American recruiting agent, suspected of working under CIA auspices, has enlisted 95 Cuban or other exile pilots in the U. S. during the last two years ostensibly to fly for the Congo, according to his notarized statement with the Justice Department.

A 46-year-old New Yorker, Gerald N. Saunders, gives a Bronx address in a filing with the Foreign Agents Registration Section of Justice, Saunders, who calls himself an industrial and personnel consultant, contends he paid out \$215,000 to recruit the pilots.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff is aware of the case and plans to look into it, it was learned.

SAUNDERS, WHO says he visited the Congo in 1962, states in his filing that his original contract with the Congo was "to locate and recruit qualified Cuban pilots" willing to fly for the Congo.

Peculiarly, the pilots are not limited to Congo flying but must be willing to serve "anywhere they may be sent." The newest filing by Saunders, dated Aug. 19, 1966, further broadens the possibilities by saying the latest recruits are "foreign (non-U. S.)" without specifying nationality.

Federal law bars recruitment on American soil for foreign military forces. The Justice Department filing does not show whether Saunders is recruiting for military or civilian flying.

The bulk of the \$215,000 went into \$800 advances to the pilots, two-way tickets to Leopoldville and a \$150-a-head recruiting fee that went to Saunders, according to the filing.

NON-DIPLOMATS working in the U. S. for a foreign government are required to register with the Justice Department.

Saunders' file contains a letter from a Leopoldville lawyer, Horton R. Telford, dated Nov. 16, 1964, that purports to explain the strange deal.

In the letter, Telford advises Saunders that the Congo government has approved Saunders to "hire qualified pilots in the U. S. for employment in the Congo by the Congolese government." The Congo was at civil war during the period.

Saunders could not be reached for comment. The address given on the Justice Department filing is the residence of a stock broker who said he had no idea what Saunders did, but that he had boarded at the house for about two years. Prior to that, Saunders gave Baltimore as his address and birthplace.

Saunders' notarized statements say he paid out \$75,000 on the "recruitment program" for 32 pilots in 1966, and \$140,000 in 1965 to recruit 63 pilots.

No official would say for the record that the Saunders enterprise was CIA-backed, but a New York paper reported last April that Cuban exile pilots in the Congo flew B-26 bombers on raids and the "sponsor, paymaster and director" of the operation was the CIA. The CIA recruited the pilots through a Florida "private" firm, said the newspaper.

ONE MYSTERY in the "recruitment program" is that State Department officials in Miami as well as a leader of a major exile group, the "Cuban Representa-

tion of Exiles," said they had no word whatsoever of such recruiting in the last two years.

Ernesto Freyre, coordinator for foreign affairs in the exile group, said it "wouldn't surprise me" if the CIA had done the earlier recruiting, but added that he had not heard of any recent recruiting.

At the Justice Department, Nathan Lenoin, head of the Foreign

Agents Registration Section, said he had not reported any pilot recruitment.

At the State Department, a spokesman for the Bureau of African Affairs said "nobody wants to comment on it." The State Department, at the time of reports that the CIA had cover operations going in the Congo civil unrest, had also declined comment.

Hearst Headline Service did a story in July, 1965, on the first Saunders filing, but at that time there was no reason to suspect CIA involvement, and Saunders